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TAGS: PGOV KDEM ELAB ASEC GV

SUBJECT: PM DENOUNCES +BULLETIN ROUGE, - OFFERS CONCILIATORY LUMP SUM PAYMENT TO SOLDIERS

REF: A. CONAKRY 0007

1B. CONAKRY 0010
1C. CONAKRY 0029

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

11. (U) On January 9, on the eve of the nationwide strike planned by Guinea's labor unions (reftels), the Ministry of Defense announced plans to pay every soldier a flat sum of \$482, which is equivalent to about four months pay for an average soldier. The military has not conducted an accurate count of its enlisted ranks for over a year, but the total payout is estimated to be at least \$2 million, if not more. Starting January 11, the Ministry of Defense began paying out the promised amounts, which will reportedly be paid in two installments to each soldier.

12. (C) The Office of the Prime Minister released a letter addressed to the Guinean Army writ large on January 15, which was provided to the Embassy by a military contact, announcing the payout. The letter begins with Under the instruction of the Head of State, Commander of Guinea's Armed Forces..., In the letter, the PM explains his administration's investigations into what is known as the Bulletin Rouge.,

13. (U) The Bulletin Rouge has been an issue that has plagued the military for several years. Following the Liberian attack on Guinea in 2001, President Conte reportedly told an assembly of soldiers that he would work to improve their living conditions. The soldiers reportedly assumed this to mean that they would receive salary increases. However, when the higher salaries did not materialize, soldiers started to accuse the Ministry of Defense of pocketing the missing salary increase over a period of years, an issue that has become increasingly difficult for the Ministry to manage. Under the January 27 Accords, Prime Minister Kouyate was tasked with conducting an audit of the Ministry of Defense in order to determine if there was any truth behind the allegations.

14. (SBU) In the January 15 letter, Kouyate announced that the audit did not reveal any differences between the amounts paid to soldiers and the amounts released to the Ministry of Defense to pay those salaries. He clearly states that there never was a bulletin rouge.. However, Kouyate goes on to state that the investigation commission recommended to the Chief of State, in the spirit of reconciliation,, to offer some small compensation. Kouyate then announces the lump sum payments and asks that the soldiers consider such payments as an end to the Bulletin Rouge dilemma.

COMMENT

15. (C) The announcement of the lump sum payment on the eve of the strike may have been a targeted political move to ensure military loyalty, but it is unclear whether it was the office of the president or the office of the prime minister that actually made the move. Finance Minister Dore told the Ambassador a few weeks ago that auditors had determined that the bulletin rouge did not exist. The fact that the letter came from the prime minister's office although sources indicate that it was the president who authorized the payout, suggest that both sides may be trying to take credit. However, the soldiers may not be willing to drop the Bulletin Rouge issue, which means that either side could also take the fall for it.

16. (S) It is interesting to note that the Kouyate administration also conducted a pilot test a few months ago wherein instead of having military officials collect the military payroll and pay it out, they had civilian officials pay the salaries directly to the soliders. They reportedly were left with a significant amount of cash suggesting that quite a bit of money was being pocketed by senior officials. If that information were to come out, the average soldier may not make the distinction between the alleged Bulletin Rouge and straightforward embezzlement. END COMMENT.

CARTER